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ABSTRACT

The role teacher educators may play as participants in teacher centers is discussed. It is pointed out that teacher center programs and services would be enhanced if they were linked to the educational research community generally and the research on teaching community specifically. The suggestion is made that this linking function can be provided by individual teacher educators who possess and exhibit appropriate attitudes and behaviors prerequisite to effective teacher-research collaboration. The value to teachers of collaboration with education researchers in putting into practice in the classroom newly developed theories is stressed. The qualifications and qualities of an effective linking agent between colleges of education and teacher centers are described. (JD)

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A Symposium

Teacher Centers: The New Market Place for Teacher Educators?

One Point of View: A Resounding Maybe!

prepared by

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As I was gathering background material for this paper, I had occasion to mention the title of this symposium to one of my friends. As I recount my interchange with him it will become obvious to you that he is not and really does not "understand" the significance of the question reflected in the title. His reasoning went something like this. He asked me if he was correct in assuming that teacher centers were for teachers. I assured him that they were. He then asked me if he was correct in assuming that teacher educators were themselves first and foremost "teachers." I again answered in the affirmative. He then hastily concluded that if teacher centers are for teachers and teacher educators are themselves teachers, then it logically followed that teacher centers are for teacher educators.

I immediately recognized that I could not fault his conclusion once I granted him the earlier premises. I quickly attempted to add a significant qualification to the discussion. I told him that teacher educators were a special type of teacher in that their students were themselves teachers or aspiring teachers. This new information prompted him to ask whether teachers learn from other teachers. Not learning from the first interchange, I quickly and proudly responded that teachers learn from other teachers all the time. He then asked whether it would be fair to describe the teacher who learns from another teacher as a "student" and the teacher providing the new knowledge, information or insight as a "teacher educator"? Recognizing that one of those logical traps might lie ahead, I reluctantly said that his descriptions were probably fair. He then sprung his trap by logically concluding that if all teachers, at one time or another, play the role of teacher educator and teacher centers are for teachers but not teacher educators, then

teacher centers exist to serve no one since there are no teachers who are not also teacher educators.

In a desperate attempt to help my friend get a more realistic understanding of teacher centers I redirected our conversation to the question of the intended purpose of the teacher centers. I told him that teacher centers are designed to provide programs and experiences that will enhance the teacher's instructional effectiveness in the classroom. My friend then asked the straightforward question, "Are teacher educators interested in improving their instructional effectiveness?" Even as the exceptions flashed through my mind, I responded by saying that I thought most teacher educators were so motivated. He then asked whether the instructional problems and self-devised solutions likely to be described by teachers represented the kind of information that could be valuable to teacher educators as they seek to improve their instructional effectiveness. I indicated my belief that teachers represented an invaluable source of information and insight that would benefit teacher educators. He then answered that, to the extent that teachers discuss and share their problems and solutions with others in teacher centers, teacher educators would be denied a source of rich and valuable information if they were discouraged from interacting with teachers who participated in teacher centers.

Fortunately, our topic of conversation changed at that point. However, I must say that I am grateful that this paper is intended for an audience of educators who, unlike my friend, "understand" the question implied in the symposium title. I'll leave it to you to judge whether the question being addressed in the symposium is better handled using the logical processes of my friend or the information that comes with the understanding and insight we in the education enterprise possess.

In this paper I will attempt to argue that: (1) teacher center programs and services would be enhanced if they were "linked" to the educational research community generally and the research on teaching community specifically and (2) this linking function can be provided by individuals -- some of whom may be teacher educators -- who possess and exhibit appropriate attitudes and behaviors prerequisite to effective teacher-researcher collaboration.

Before I attempt to develop my position, let me indicate at the outset that I am well aware of the fact that many schools and colleges of education are currently experiencing a serious problem of declining enrollments in their teacher preparation programs. As a result, many of these institutions find themselves in the difficult position of having large numbers of underutilized tenured faculty members. While I hope to convince you that some of these individuals can find new and meaningful roles "linking" institutions of higher education with teacher centers, I am not trying to solve the "surplus" faculty problem at the expense of the evolving teacher centers program.

Having acknowledged that I'm not approaching this topic from the point of view of a "salvage operation" for teacher educators, I must admit that my perspective on the topic has been significantly influenced by my past experiences in working with both teachers and teacher educators and the institutional context in which I am currently functioning. Whether you can agree with my perspective or not, I believe you will better understand it if you have some sense of my immediate institutional context.

As a member of the faculty of the College of Education at Michigan State University, one of the nation's largest teacher preparation institutions, I also find myself in one of the large teacher educator

communities. From my experience, I would say that this community consists of individuals who exemplify the "best" and perhaps the "worst" of teacher educators. I feel confident in saying that the effectiveness of teacher centers would be diminished if some of my colleagues -- the best examples -- were discouraged from participating in teacher centers programs simply because they are higher education-based teacher educators. Similarly, I feel equally confident in saying that the effectiveness of teacher centers also would be diminished if some of my colleagues -- the poorer examples -- were permitted or, even worse, were expected to participate in teacher center programs simply because they were members of a higher education based teacher education community and perhaps in search of a work assignment.

The main point I wish to make with these observations is that teacher center policies relative to the involvement of teacher educators should not deal categorically with teacher educators. The teacher center staff should seek to identify kinds of attitudes and behaviors they believe are prerequisite to useful and productive participation and actively seek out those teacher educators who possess these qualities and encourage their active and sustained involvement. At a later point in this paper, I will attempt to describe some of the attitudes and behavioral qualities I feel are prerequisite to effective participation.

The perspective I am trying to develop in this paper has been significantly influenced by a second contextual factor impacting on me. I am a charter member of the Institute for Research on Teaching at Michigan State University. As you probably know, the Institute for Research on Teaching was established in 1976 when M.S.U. received a major grant from the National Institute of Education. We recently received word that the original three year grant has been extended through summer 1981.

In addition to participating in the development of the Institute's programs of research, I am responsible for its dissemination efforts. I was offered that responsibility, in part, because of my commitment to the belief that researchers have a responsibility to communicate their research findings in a meaningful form to those who can benefit from them. To that end, the Institute has organized itself in such a way that (1) teachers have had a major voice in helping us determine our research priorities and (2) the disseminations efforts of the Institute reflect our desire to communicate our research findings to the teacher community in a form that is meaningful to its membership. I won't take the time here to describe the variety of ways in which the teachers and researchers have collaborated with each other in the Institute for Research on Teaching. It is sufficient to say that based on our relatively brief history and limited experiences, we have affirmed our belief that the continued effectiveness of the Institute's programs of research can and will be maintained if and only if we are able to maintain the high levels of teacher-researcher collaboration we have experienced to this point.

My reason for describing the Institute as a contextual factor that has influenced my position in this paper is intended to illustrate the essential contribution that teachers collaborating with researchers can make to the resultant research. As has been evidenced in our research, I believe that the same sort of collaboration can and would have a significant impact on teachers participating in teacher centers for the purpose of improving their teacher effectiveness.

In the Institute, we have struggled to maintain open two-way communication between the researchers and teachers. We know it can work and we know we can and must do more; however, we also recognize that

we are faced with a serious dilemma. On the one hand, researchers need to attend to the research if it is going to be completed. On the other hand, we know that the quality and relevance of the research is enhanced when researchers dialogue with teachers. Unfortunately, it seems that attending to one aspect of the process inevitably means you must turn your attention away from the other to some degree. I believe that some of my teacher educator colleagues could "fill the brook" and effectively serve as the "linking agent" thus insuring that our goal of maintaining an open two-way communication system is realized.

Linking Knowledge Users with Knowledge Producers

My argument is that the research and teaching communities must be "linked." If we do not see to it that they are "linked" I fear that both will retreat to a level of "parochialism" that would be embarrassing and counterproductive to both. It occurs to me that my argument is strengthened by using an analogy drawn from another industry and to some extent an earlier time. I believe my perspective is enriched by drawing a parallel between the educational and the agricultural industries. In my opinion, many of the systemic problems I am discussing parallel those previously encountered in the field of agriculture.

Most land-grant institutions, including Michigan State University, have faced the problem of "linking" knowledge producing units (agricultural experiment stations) with knowledge users (farmers and farming communities). I believe you would agree if you looked at the record that the "extension programs" have proven to be extremely successful in bridging across these two "worlds."

In order to develop the parallels between agriculture and education it is essential that I indicate the various components of the two systems.

Agricultural Industry	Educational Industry
Farmers	Teachers
County Office	Teacher Centers
Agricultural Experiment Stations	Educational Research Institutions
Cooperative Extension Agent	?

There are a number of parallels between the two fields which add credibility to the argument and analogy. Without going into great detail let me highlight some:

1. Like teachers, the individual farmer was free to use or not use the county office as a source of information regarding farming problems generally and his problems specifically.

2. Like teacher centers, the success and credibility of the county office was dependent on its ability to effectively respond to the needs, problems and concerns of the individual farmer.

3. Like teacher centers, the county office became a place where farmers gathered, shared problems and solutions, helped each other and learned from each other.

4. Like teacher centers, the county agent's office became a crucial nexus where individual farmers' problems were recognized as general farming community problems and where new agricultural technologies were adapted to the unique needs of the farmers and farming community served by that office.

5. Like teacher centers, the agricultural extension agency was responsible for conveying "farmer problems" to the experiment stations where they could be researched and hopefully answers could be found.

6. Like the agricultural experiment station, the educational research institutions must accept the problems, needs and concerns that flow to them from the teaching community as legitimate and be about the business of devoting research time and effort to these concerns.

7. Like the agricultural industry, education needs its own version of the cooperative extension agent to provide that critical linkage between the research institutions and our teaching constituency.

It might prove useful to continue but for this discussion I believe the analogy has served its purpose. If we can in principle accept the point of view illustrated by examining the parallels in the analogy, we are left with two questions: (1) Who can and should play that "linkage role"? and (2) What qualifications and qualities are required to develop that role successfully?

). Who can play the "linking role" between the teacher centers and the research and development institutions? It would seem that the individuals designated to link these two components of the overall system could come from institutions of higher education, the teaching ranks or even elsewhere. I'm sure that some individuals who would be on the staff of a teacher center would be interested in the role and if given the opportunity would perform well. Similarly, I believe some of the teacher educators have already served in the linking role between teachers, researchers and developers and would also be willing and able to meet this crucial responsibility.

From my perspective, the place of origin of the linking agent is not as critical as the individual's ability to establish and maintain a credibility and co-membership in both settings. He/she must demonstrate that he/she can communicate effectively with teachers and with researchers. This competency is relatively rare and would render many if not most teachers and teacher educators less than qualified for the position. Nevertheless, if we can agree that it would be desirable to have such individuals in the overall system, then I think we can find individuals who already have these skills or with some training could develop them. For example, I believe that the teacher collaborators who have worked in the Institute for Research on Teaching have established the ability to communicate effectively with teachers and researchers. Similarly,

I believe some of the research oriented teacher educators who have been involved in our experiential teacher education programs such as Teacher Corps also have the prerequisite skills and competencies being called for here.

Teacher Educators as Linking Agents

I am sure that, like teacher educators, classroom teachers would experience some adjustment problems if they chose to make the transition from the teaching role to the "linking" role. I'm not prepared to articulate the type of transition problems that would be experienced by the classroom teachers. However, I do believe I can anticipate stress points that would be experienced by teacher educators who attempted the transition. I would like to mention four such factors:

1. As faculty members, teacher educators have tended to function quite autonomously and individually and the linking role would require individuals to work collaboratively with others. For some, the ability to function under such conditions would be difficult if not traumatic.

2. Traditionally, teacher educators have been in a "power relationship" with their students. They have been able to make demands on students and evaluate their students' performance. The linking role would be stripped of this power and the individuals would not be able to make such demands on the constituency. For some teacher educators, the removal of these elements of power would provoke tremendous anxiety.

3. Teacher educators traditionally work with groups of students in organized classes that have specified goals, objectives, assignments, etc. In many instances the linking agent would be working with individuals, not groups, and would not have the certainty that comes with formal class specifications. Many teacher educators would not be comfortable in one to one relationships which are as open ended as that between teachers and the linking agent.

4. Teacher educators tend to deal in content which is generally abstract and rather theoretical. The linking agent would be expected to deal with content and problems that are concrete, specific and probably atheoretical. Many teacher educators would have great difficulty in making this essential transition and translation. A similar problem would likely be encountered when teacher educators communicated with researchers who have

their own language which is extremely concrete and often extremely abstract.

When we look at these four probable stress factors, we may be tempted to conclude that teacher educators and perhaps teachers would find these transitions insurmountable. However, I want to quickly indicate that my experience tells me that there are individuals who, for whatever reasons, are extremely successful at playing this role. Since I believe the role is essential, I would strongly recommend that we seek out these individuals and strive to understand how they are able to perform this difficult task.

Qualifications and Qualities of an Effective "Linking" Agent

What qualifications or qualities are required to play the role of linking teacher centers with researcher and developers? We have already mentioned a few: the ability to communicate effectively with both teachers and researchers, the ability to establish and maintain credibility with both groups with whom they would be constantly interacting.

Other special qualities would include the capacity to see both teachers and researchers as colleagues. The collegial and collaborative relationship is the essential base on which the effective two-way communication can be built. Without it, true open two-way communication will not occur.

Our linking agent must be a good listener willing to listen to the teacher and be able to encourage the teacher to elaborate on their problems, needs and professional role and responsibilities in a non-threatening manner. Similarly our linking agent must be able to listen to the researcher and help the researcher communicate research products and problems in a way that can be understood by the teachers.

Our linking agent must believe on the one hand that teacher needs and concerns are real and legitimate and, on the other, believe that researchers ought to effectively address these concerns in their research programs. Our linking agent must be able to persuade teachers that research findings may be useful and worthy of consideration as possible answers to some of their concerns. In this sense the linking agent must be a bit of a salesman, selling teacher problems and needs to researchers and selling research findings to teachers. I want to quickly add that this salesman role should not be interpreted to mean that our linking agent can or should engage in the "hard sell" tactics all-too-familiar to us. Such strategies would prove to be counterproductive and would surely undermine the linking agent's credibility with teachers or researchers or both.

Summary

In this paper I have made several points relative to the question of whether teacher centers can or should represent a new marketplace for teacher educators. The main points of my position are:

1. As a category of individuals, university or college based teacher educators should be neither expertly included or excluded from teacher center activities. Teacher educators who demonstrate certain qualities and competencies should be encouraged to participate because they can and would make a significant contribution to teacher center programs.

2. The educational research community generally and the research on teaching community specifically must be linked with teacher centers. The absence of such a linkage will diminish the effectiveness of both communities.

3. Some teacher educators and teachers can provide this critical "linkage" between the two communities. The qualities and competencies prerequisite to success as a "linking agent" are at least partially known and others can be explicated with further study and cross-community dialogue.

4. Teacher educators because of their traditional modes of behavior, are likely to experience stress as they attempt to make the transition from a traditional teacher educator role to the "linking agent" role I have described.

5. While stresses and strains are likely to be encountered by both teachers and teacher educators as they assume the role of a linking agent, the transition can be made.

I would welcome an opportunity to discuss my agruments with members of the research and teaching communities. I believe the teacher centers represent a unique and exciting opportunity for researchers and teachers to collaboratively work to enhance the instructional opportunities available to all who participate in the education enterprise.